

## L O U N G E R.

[ N<sup>o</sup> LXX. ]

Saturday, June 3. 1786.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

**A**FTER a residence of many years in the southern part of this island, business concurring with the natural desire one has of revisiting one's native country, induced me to make a journey to Scotland in the beginning of last autumn. As I travelled on horseback, with a single servant attending me, I was tempted frequently to strike out of the common road, for the purpose of enjoying some of those romantic scenes with which the northern counties of England abound. One evening about sunset, after traversing a part of the country, of great beauty, but of a wild and uncultivated aspect, I entered suddenly a narrow valley, where every thing wore the appearance of high cultivation; and in the judicious blending of ornament with utility, it was easy to perceive that industry had been guided by the hand of taste.

While I rode at leisure down a steep and winding path, indulging that pleasing species of reverie to which a scene of this kind naturally gives rise, a small column of smoke ascending from a thick tuft of trees at the bottom, gave notice of a habitation; and on turning the corner of a hedged inclosure, a low mansion broke suddenly upon my view, having in front about an acre of open ground, of which the greatest part was laid out as a kitchen-garden and shrubbery. A level grass-plot surrounded the house, which was separated from the garden by a white rail. The house itself was of one story, extending, in a lengthened front, with two small wings, at either end of which a fruit-tree was trained around the window. A green garden-chair was placed on each side of the door.

While surveying with much pleasure this little elegant retreat, I passed upon the road, a ruddy-coloured, middle-aged man, in a plain country-dress, whose face, it immediately occurred to me, I had somewhere before seen. Uncertain, however, whether there might be any thing more than one of those accidental resemblances which we every day meet with, (though I perceived that he at the same time viewed me with some attention), I passed on. Meeting afterwards with some labourers returning from work, I inquired the name of the proprietor of the little villa I had been contemplating, and was informed it was a *Mr Saintfort*. The name struck me. I recollected to have known at college a Will. Saintfort, a young man of some fortune, of a lively turn, and quick parts, but in the greatest degree thoughtless and extravagant. I remembered to have since heard that he had married a fashionable wife, whose disposition was much akin to his own; and that he had in a very few years spent his whole fortune. "Can this," said I to myself, "be my old companion? Sure I thought I knew his face, and he too recollected mine. It must be so: yet how this metamorphosis?" Occupied with these thoughts, I had slackened my pace, and was surprised to find myself once more joined by the gentleman I had before passed. "If I mistake not," said he, "your name is D——." "Yes, and yours Saintfort."—"The same. How unexpected this meeting!"—After much mutual gratulation, "Come," said he, "you go no farther this night; nor, with my will, for some days. You must take a bed with your old friend, and see how Farmer Saintfort lives."

Entreaty was needless; for I was delighted with the rencounter; and I followed my friend, who led the way to the stables, and assisted himself in putting up my horses. He then conducted me into the house, which within corresponded entirely with its external appearance. In a little hall through which we entered, were some angling rods and fowling pieces, with a weed-hook and garden-rake. In the parlour stood a piano forte, on which lay a violin and some music; and in a corner of the room, which was shelved for the purpose, were ranged a few books of

husbandry and ornamental gardening, some volumes of English poetry, Hutchinson's Moral Philosophy, Horace, and a few of the Latin classics.

An old servant now made his appearance, and received orders to acquaint his mistress to prepare the stranger's bed-room, and to get ready an early supper. In the interval we sauntered out into the fields, and passed the time in ordinary chit-chat about our old companions, till we were summoned to supper by a comely boy of twelve years of age, who, with a girl three years younger, were my friend's only children. Mr Saintfort introduced me to his wife by the title of an old and valued acquaintance; and I found in that lady the most perfect politeness and affability, joined to that easy gracefulness of manner which distinguishes those who have moved in a superior walk of life. Our supper was plain, but delicious; an excellent pullet, milk in a variety of forms, and fresh vegetables; our conversation interesting, animated, and good-humoured. In my life, I never spent a more delightful evening. After Mrs Saintfort had retired, (like Eve, "on hospitable thoughts intent,") "There," said Saintfort, "there, Mr D——, is one of the first, the best of women. You knew me formerly; and I have marked the natural surprise you shewed at finding me in this situation. You shall have my story; for to an old friend and companion, simple as it is, it cannot fail to be interesting."

"My father's death, which happened a few years after I entered to the university, made me, as you may remember, the envy of many of our common acquaintance, as it was generally supposed I had succeeded to a fortune of L. 2000 *per annum*. I had before this contracted many habits of extravagance; and the dissipation into which I now plunged, joined to an indolence of temper not uncommon at that period of life, prevented me for a considerable time from discovering that the free rents of my estate did not exceed one half of the income I was supposed to possess. Even after that discovery, the relish I had acquired for every species of fashionable dissipation, and the absurd vanity of supporting the appearance of a man of fortune, led me to continue my expences, after I had become convinced that they were leading me to my ruin.

"My vanity was not a little flattered by the attentions shewn me by the ladies, who, it was easy to be perceived, regarded me as a young fellow, of whom there was some honour in making a conquest. *Lucinda N——* was at that time the ornament of the politest circles in town. What her figure was in those days you may guess from what you see it is at present. With every attraction of face and person, endowed with every fashionable accomplishment, and possessing a very handsome independent fortune, she had numberless admirers. It was no mean triumph when I perceived that this little despot, who exercised upon others all the capricious sovereignty of a coquette, maintained with me so opposite a manner as to convince me of her decided affection. I availed myself of the discovery, which gratified equally my pride and my passion; for I really loved her; and in my marriage with Lucinda, whose temper and taste were apparently much resembling my own, I flattered myself with the continued enjoyment of those fashionable pleasures, which I had now extended the means of procuring.

"When I look back to the first four years of my married state, it is like the confused remembrance of some tumultuous dream. In that perpetual dissipation in which we were now involved, and to which the gay and lively temper of my wife rather prompted than imposed any restraint, I did not perceive that her fortune, considerable as it was, was totally insufficient to repair the waste I had already made in my own. At length I was awakened from my lethargy by a refusal of my banker to make further advances without additional securities; and when I applied for that purpose to a friend, he frankly told me that I was generally considered as a ruined man.

"In place of being overpowered by this intelligence, it brought me to my senses;—like those violent applications, which, by pain itself, put a stop to the delirium of a fever. I saw the folly of concealment, and the inhumanity of allowing my wife to learn our situation from any tongue but my own. But to make this terrible avowal, occasioned a conflict of mind, such as it is impossible for me to describe. I passed two sleepless nights, without finding courage to unbosom myself; and Lucinda's anxious inquiries at length led to the discovery. The shock

shock was severe; and for a moment she gave way to the natural feelings of a woman. It was but for a moment;—when, as if animated by a new soul, and inspired with a fortitude of mind which astonished me, “Come, my dear Will,” said she, clasping me to her bosom, “we have both been fools; it is fit that we should pay the price of our folly: But let us thence learn to be wise. Thank God, we are blest with health, and with each other’s affection; and there is yet much of life before us.”——“But what,” said I, “is to be done?”——“To be done!” said she;—“Justice, in the first place. Let us learn with accuracy the full extent of our debts, and the means we have to discharge them.”

“It was a struggle yet more severe to declare my situation to the world; and suffering under a feeling of false shame, I would have meanly wasted the time in useless procrastination: but the noble spirit of my Lucinda combated this unmanly weakness. It was no surprise to the world to learn with certainty what had long been expected. In a little time the amount of our debts and effects was ascertained with precision; and, setting apart a small proportion of my wife’s fortune, which was secured to her by law, the rest, together with mine, fell short of the payment of our debts by L. 2000 Sterling. Having, however, made a fair surrender of all that was my own, I compounded with my creditors, and received their discharge.

“It remained to determine what was to be our plan of life for the future. An old domestic of my father’s had been for several years settled in the north of England, where he rented this farm from the Earl of ——. Hither we proposed to retire for a few months, till we should arrange our future schemes. I was struck with the wild and romantic scenery of this beautiful dale; and, harassed as I had been with care and anxiety, my spirits were soothed for some time by the quiet and solitude of the country. I own to you, my friend, that this composure of mind was not permanent. The man of the world cannot at once assume the manners and taste of a recluse. The change was too violent, from the tumult of my former life, to the dead calm in which I now passed my time. After some weeks acquaintance had worn off the edge of novelty, I no longer saw the same beauties in the fields, the woods, the rocks that had at first engaged me. The manners of the country people offended by their vulgarity; and in the society of a few of the neighbouring gentry I found nothing to amuse a cultivated mind, or engage a lively imagination. I looked back with regret to the splendor and bustle of my former life; and, impossible as it was for me to indulge in the same gratifications, I would gladly have returned to town; and would, perhaps, have performed the same humiliating part I have seen exhibited by the decayed minions of fashion, spendthrifts like myself, who haunt, like ghosts, the places of public resort, content to be the spectators of those scenes where they have formerly figured as the most brilliant actors. My Lucinda saw with anxiety this increasing disgust, and her good sense directed to its proper remedy. “We grow tired,” said she, “of this life of inactivity. We languish for want of an object to occupy us. I have been meditating to make a small experiment; and if you approve, we shall put it in execution. What if we should for a while become farmers ourselves? You are surprised at the proposal, but let me explain my meaning. Suppose our good landlord should transfer to us the remainder of his lease; that he should have the charge of management, with a suitable recompence, while the chance of profit, and the risk of loss, should be ours. I know he will agree to it, for I have sounded him on the subject. The laborious part, the business of agriculture, shall be his, while we occupy ourselves in decorating this little spot with a thousand embellishments, which nature points out, and which your good taste could easily execute. Remember, it is only an experiment. Our bargain must be conditional. If we tire of it, we can when we please drop the scheme, and pursue any other we chuse to adopt.” To be short, Sir, I was pleased with the idea; our plan was soon arranged, and I became what you now see me, Farmer Saintfort.

I set to work with alacrity in the business of improvement; and proceeding on the principle of uniting beauty with utility, I had, in the space of a few months, accomplished the outlines of that plan which I have been continually occupied since that time in finishing in detail. In this employment, in which the mind has much more share than is generally imagined, I found a source of pleasure infinitely beyond



yond my expectation. Every day added to the beauties of my little paradise; and I had the satisfaction of finding that those operations which the motive of ornament had first suggested, were frequently of the most substantial benefit. The beautiful variety of the ground was obscured by an undistinguished mass of brushwood. I enlarged the extent of my arable ground, by opening fields to the sun, which had lain hid under a matting of furze and brambles. In the formation of a fish-pond, I have drained an unwholesome fen, and converted a quagmire into a luxuriant meadow. At the end of the first year, my tutor in husbandry gave me hopes that the succeeding crop would double the returns which the farm had ever afforded under his management; and the event justified his prediction. How delightful, my dear friend, was it for me to perceive that the taste of my Lucinda seemed equally adapted with my own to our new mode of life! Far from inheriting that instability of mind with which her sex is generally reproached, her ardour was unabated, and every thought was centred in the cares of her household, and the education of her children. Completely engaged in these domestic duties, while I superintended the labours of the fields and garden, we had no other anxiety than what tended to give a zest to our enjoyments. In place of feeling time lie heavy on our hands, we rose with the sun, and found the day too short for its occupations.

"We had now learned by experience, how very moderate an income is sufficient to purchase all the real comforts of life. At the conclusion of the third year, on summing up our accounts, we found a clear saving of L. 400. This sum we might, perhaps, without any breach of what the world terms honesty, have considered as our own. But (thank God!) slaves as we had been to the world, we had better notions of moral rectitude. It was unfit that we should accumulate for ourselves, while there existed a single person that could say, we had done him wrong. We set apart this sum as the beginning of a fund for the payment of that equitable claim which yet remained to our creditors; and it is now some years since we could boast of having faithfully discharged the last farthing of our debts. The pleasure attendant on this reflection, you may conceive, but I cannot describe. How poor, in comparison to it, are the selfish gratifications of vanity, the mean indulgence of pampered appetites, and all the train of luxurious enjoyments, when bought at the expence of conscience!

"Since my residence here, I have more than once made a visit to town on an errand of business. I there see the same scenes as formerly; and others intoxicated, like myself, with the same giddy pleasures. To me the magical delusion is at an end; and I wonder where lay the charm which once had such power of fascination. But one species of pleasure I have enjoyed from these visits, which I cannot omit to mention; the affectionate welcome I have received from the most respectable of my old acquaintance. I read from their countenances their approbation of my conduct; and in their kindness, mingled with respect, I have a reward valuable in proportion to the worth of those who bestow it. Nor is the pleasure less which I derive from the regard and esteem of my honest neighbours in the country. Of their characters I had formed a very unfair estimate, when seen through the medium of my own distempered mind; and in their society my Lucinda and I enjoy, if not the refined pleasures of polished intercourse, the more valuable qualities of sincerity, probity, and good sense.

"Such, Sir, for these fourteen years past has been my manner of life; nor do I believe I shall ever exchange it for another. The term of my lease has, within that period, been renewed in my own name, and that of my son. If a more active life should be *his* choice, he is free to pursue it. I shall be content with the reflection of having bestowed on him a better patrimony than I myself enjoyed,—a mind uncorrupted by the prospect of hereditary affluence, and a constitution tempered to the virtuous habits of industry and sobriety."

Here Mr Saintfort made an end of his story. I have given it as nearly as I could in his own words; and judging it to afford an example not unworthy to be recorded, I transmit it in that view to the author of a work which bids fair to pass down to posterity.—I am, Sir, yours,

J. D.